

Week Ending Friday, November 17, 2000

Interview With Maria Salinas of Univision

October 30, 2000

Budget Negotiations

Ms. Salinas. Okay, let's start talking exactly about what's happening now on Capitol Hill. Of course, you're in the middle of a very bitter battle with Congress on the remaining legislation that you want passed, but Republicans are blaming you and accusing you of not wanting to negotiate. Are you willing to compromise with them on certain issues?

The President. Of course, but let's look at the facts here. We signed—I have signed all but two of the appropriations bills they have passed. There's only two appropriations bills left and one bill dealing with taxes and restoring funds to the health care system.

Now, in every case where we have negotiated in good faith, we have reached compromise, and I have signed a bill. I signed a bill the other day which had the biggest increase in the history of the country for land preservation; another bill which provided almost 80,000 vouchers for people to move from welfare to work and have housing vouchers; another bill which provided real improvements in veterans' health care programs.

So we've had lots and lots of bills that resolved longstanding differences in a principled, compromised way. The only difference is that the ones that are outstanding that they're blaming me for, instead of negotiating, they basically walked out of the room, left the Democrats in the White House there. They came up with their own bill. They said, "This is the best we can do. Take it or leave it." Now, that's not a negotiation. And that's a matter of fact. No one disputes that.

So I'm prepared to negotiate with them but not to let them run over me. That's one of the big things the voters have to think about in this election year, is whether they

really want the Republican leadership in control of Congress and then someone in the White House of the same party that allows them to do this sort of thing without any kind of restraint, because they would—the leadership is to the right of their own constituency.

We were just talking before the interview started that at 2:30 in the morning, this morning, we had reached an agreement on an education bill that also involves the Labor Department, that would constitute the biggest increase in education in history. We'd double the number of kids in after-school programs. We would have a lot more teachers to make classes small in the early grades. We put a lot more money into teacher quality. We'd do more for repairing schools that are overcrowded or crumbling. We would provide more funds to identify and then turn around failing schools. It's a hugely important bill.

And it contains some important compromises between labor and business on labor issues, including a bill to protect workers who suffer from stress-related injuries on the job—physical stress, I mean. So the Republicans shook hands on it, and then they went back to their leaders, and they said, "No, our lobbyists won't like this," so they wrecked the deal. Now, that's not a failure of bipartisanship; that's a failure of leadership on their side.

Every bill where we've negotiated, we've gotten an agreement. The only bills where we're at loggerheads now are this one, where the leaders overrule their own negotiators, and the other two, where they won't negotiate with us. And there's a lot in there: immigrant fairness, minimum wage increase, the new markets legislation to give people incentives to invest in the poor areas of America that have been left behind. There's a lot of important work still to be done.

"Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act"

Ms. Salinas. I want to talk about that one bill—the Latino immigration, and it's the "Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act." It's definitely one of the major barriers in getting the budget bill passed. How far are you willing to go to get this legislation passed?

The President. Quite far. We've made some headway. They have allowed, for example, the relatives of people who are already in this country legally to come to this country after a certain amount of time if their naturalization process has not been completed. I think that's quite good.

But so far, the Congress has not been willing to treat immigrants from Honduras or Guatemala or El Salvador the same way they treated immigrants from Nicaragua and Cuba. And I just don't think there's any difference there. I think if you fled a violent political atmosphere in your home country, it shouldn't matter what the nature of the regime was, as long as it was a regime that violated the rule of law and human rights and put people in danger.

So I feel very strongly that they should all be treated the same. And that also affects people from Haiti, people from Liberia, as well as the Latinos from Central America. I think it's very important that we treat them fairly, and I'll keep working at it until—we'll make as much progress as we can. I feel very, very strongly about this. I can't imagine why—how the Republicans could justify treating the Cubans and the Nicaraguans different from the Hondurans and the Guatemalans and the Salvadorans.

Ms. Salinas. What part of the immigration bill are you willing to compromise on if you're faced with a Government shutdown?

The President. Well, I don't think they'll ever shut the Government down again. And I think the real issue is whether we can get this whole bill in return for other compromises in this appropriations bill. It's called the Commerce/State/Justice appropriations bill. The negotiations are complicated. They cover a lot of different factors, and all I can tell you is, I'm going to drive the hardest bargain I can on this, because I just feel very strongly about it.

Now, we may or may not be able to get it all, but I am certainly prepared to fight

very hard. I just don't think you can justify treating one group of immigrants that have been here legally—they're working; they're paying taxes; they're making a contribution to our country; no one questions that they came here legally. How in the world we could disrupt families and send some of them home or not legalize their position here, when we've done exactly the same thing for people from other countries, is just beyond me. I just don't think it can be justified.

Ms. Salinas. Do you support amnesty, in theory?

The President. Well, that's what—of course, the Republicans are saying this is an amnesty bill, but what we're saying is, at least we want fairness. We want all groups of immigrants treated fairly. Then we can see if there are others who are here that aren't covered by the statute. But we had a general amnesty when the immigration act was passed before. And I think what's important is—look, I don't have any problem with it. I believe we should—

Ms. Salinas. But there hasn't been amnesty since 1986.

The President. That was a long time ago. What I think we should do is to treat all the people who are—who came here legally, and who have been here fairly since then—that's what I think we should do. Amnesty implies that this is about people who didn't come here legally. We're talking about people who came here lawfully, that now are being treated differently in terms of whether they can stay. There are people who are working, paying taxes; they have children. It's not right. It's just not right.

You cannot justify the position that the majority party in Congress is taking on this. At least I don't think you can, and I'm trying to get it straightened out.

Illegal Immigration

Ms. Salinas. What do you think we should do with the 6 million undocumented workers that live in the United States?

The President. Well, we've always had some illegal immigration, and I guess we always will. But that's a different subject. I don't know—there are lots of options there. I think my successor will probably have to figure out what to be done about that.

Ms. Salinas. Any suggestions to them?

The President. What?

Ms. Salinas. Any suggestions to your successor? Both Al Gore and Mr. Bush say they do not support an amnesty.

The President. I think it's difficult to justify a general amnesty for people who did not come here lawfully, because if you do that, then you are really burning the people who have been waiting in line patiently to come here legally. And you don't want to discriminate against them. On the other hand, I don't think you can justify not allowing legal immigrants to stay in this country, when they came here because of troubles in their own country, clearly lawfully under the American law, and now we're saying, "Okay, some can stay, but some have to go." And that's what I think. Let's deal with the biggest and most immediate problem first, and that's what it is. We've got to have fairness for these immigrants. They're legal. They ought to be able to stay here.

2000 Campaign

Ms. Salinas. You're going out on the campaign trail in the next week. Do you miss campaigning for yourself?

The President. No. I thought I would, actually. I thought I'd miss it more than I have, but this year, I think I've worked harder this year than I did when I was running. I've done about, oh, almost 200 events for people running for the House of Representatives and the United States Senate and then for the Vice President and Senator Lieberman on behalf of the Democratic Party, and I've done what I could to help my wife in New York. That's been a joy for me.

So I've enjoyed that. I think there is—you know, I love the campaign, and I'm interested in it. But I've had my time, and I've been very fortunate, and I've enjoyed it immensely. And I only hope that I can be helpful in these closing days of the election, just to clarify the choices before the American people.

I have absolutely no doubt the decisions they'll make if they understand the choices, the differences, and the consequences. So if I can help in that regard, I'll be glad to do what I can.

Ms. Salinas. The media is reporting that the Democratic leadership has asked you to come out and campaign in key States with key constituencies. Do you think they waited too long to ask you?

The President. No. First of all, I have been out there quite a lot. I haven't been out there on these kind of election-style rallies. But I don't think that was appropriate. I think that our candidates—this election, fundamentally, is about—in a Presidential election, about Senator Lieberman and Mr. Cheney and, more importantly, about Vice President Gore and Mr. Bush. That's what the election is about.

What I can do is to try to help clarify the choices, say what I believe. Everybody knows who I'm for. That's not the issue. The issue—

Ms. Salinas. Who are you for?

The President. I've even been wearing my pins every day, as you see.

Ms. Salinas. Hillary?

The President. I'm for Hillary, Gore, and Lieberman.

But I think, to go back to your question, it would have been not appropriate for me to be out there much before now because of the work I have to do here and because of the crisis we've been having in the Middle East. But I think in the last week of the campaign, people sort of expect, you know, that it's okay for the President to go out and try to rally the troops and make the last-minute arguments.

There are a lot of votes, I think, that could go either way now. And all I hope to do for the American people, at least, is to clarify their choices, because they have—there are huge differences between these two candidates and these two parties. And if people understand those differences and make their choices, then that's how democracy is supposed to work.

I mean, the country is in great shape. We're moving in the right direction, and this should be a happy election for the American people. They should be able to dream about where they want us to go and then make a judgment about who is most likely to lead us there.

Ms. Salinas. The New York Times reported earlier this month that you were personally hurt because Vice President Gore has not asked you to go out and campaign for him and he has not sought your advice. Is that, in fact, true?

The President. No, it is not true. I don't know where they got the story. I've already told them—I told them back in August; Bill Daley and I were talking about it the other day—that I thought it would not be wise for me to go out too soon, except to continue to do what I was doing. I would help them raise funds; I would do what I could. But I needed to be doing the job the American people hired me to do, and the American people needed to have an opportunity to look at the candidates and make their own judgments. I said then and I'll say now, I don't think people would object to my going out at the end of the campaign to try to make some of the last-minute arguments and rev up our forces.

But that is simply not true, and where we are heavily—

Ms. Salinas. Well, what part—

The President. —we talk to the Gore campaign several times a day. So I don't know where the story came from, but it's not accurate.

Ms. Salinas. But what part of it isn't true, though? The fact that you are not hurt or the fact that the Vice President has asked you to go out and campaign for him and has sought your advice?

The President. Both those things are true. It is also true that I agree with them. We both believe that I should not be out before this time. And it is not true that we have not been heavily involved in talking to them about the campaign. But me, personally, I needed to be President, and he needed to establish his own identity and to show, as he said at the convention, that he was his own man and he was out there running his own campaign.

And I think that what has been done to date is appropriate. So the article was not right about that.

Ms. Salinas. Mr. President, you know that there has been a lot of talk about the so-called Clinton factor. Do you believe that you are an asset or a liability to this campaign?

The President. Neither. But I think that the record—because I think it's not about me. I'm not on the ballot. Anybody that is still angry at me because of the personal mistakes I made is—the American people are fairminded. They don't hold one person responsible for another person's mistakes. So that's not an issue.

I think what is a factor in the campaign is what we did here the last 8 years that the Vice President was an integral part of. This is a different country than it was 8 years ago. And the American people need to remember that.

Eight years ago we had an economy in trouble, a society that was divided, and a political system that was paralyzed. Eight years later we've got the longest economic expansion in history; we've turned the biggest deficits into the biggest surpluses; we've got 22 million new jobs; crime is at a 26-year low; welfare is at a 32-year low. We've got a reduction in the number of people without health insurance for the first time in a dozen years. We've got cleaner air, cleaner water, safer drinking water, more land set aside than any administration in 100 years, and our schools are getting better. Test scores are up; the dropout rate is down; and college-going is at an all-time high.

And in each of these areas, we had policies that are working. So in each of these areas, Al Gore does not seek the status quo. He wants to change. But he wants to change to build on the progress we've done, to keep the prosperity going. And his opponent has very different ideas on economic policy, crime policy, environmental policy, education policy, health care policy. And the American people, if they know that, can make their own judgment about which one's right. But at least there is a test run here. We do have evidence that our way works pretty well.

Ms. Salinas. Given that you have such a solid record, you and Vice President Gore, why do you think this race is so close? Shouldn't Al Gore be far ahead?

The President. Well, I think that part of it is, when times are good, sometimes people may not pay as much attention in the beginning to the differences between the candidates. And I think, you know, Governor

Bush is a gifted campaigner, and he has made his case, and I think that the Republicans have tried with some success to blur the issues at critical points.

But the things that—as President, I’ve paid a lot of attention to the economy. And one of the things that I think is very important here is that Al Gore’s philosophy about this projected surplus is just, first, keep paying down the debt. That keeps interest rates down. That’s a tax cut for everybody. His plan will keep interest rates a percent lower for a decade. That’s \$390 billion in lower home mortgages alone, \$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments, and more business loans, more jobs, a stronger stock market.

So I think—so he says, “Pay the debt down first, then take what you’ve got left and invest it in education, health care, the environment, national security, and a tax cut.” And the opposition says, “Well, we’ve got this money. Let’s give it back to the people.” If the surplus is \$2 trillion, they propose to spend, what, about \$1.5 trillion on a tax cut, plus interest, and then \$1 trillion to partially privatize Social Security, and a \$.5 trillion—those are big numbers. But if you think the surplus is \$2 billion and you spend \$1.5 billion on taxes, \$1 billion on privatizing Social Security, and \$.5 billion on spending, you’re in deficit. That means higher interest rates.

Now, so the people have to decide: Do I want this big tax cut now and this privatization now, and do I think it will be so good that it’s worth going back into deficits and having higher interest rates?

I think from my point of view, the arithmetic here is very important, and it’s really pretty simple. You can forget about all the zeroes, and you just think that if you drop all the zeroes, whatever you spend and whatever you cut taxes can’t add up to more than two. If it does, you’re not paying down the debt as you should. And the other thing that bothers me is, you see in these controversies we’re having now, even when we have enough Republicans here to have bipartisan support for bills, the leadership is well to the right of them. And if you have the President of the same party and these leaders in Congress, I don’t know who would restrain them when it comes to what they would do in so

many areas of our national life, and that bothers me.

If you think about the last 6 years, all the times when we’ve gotten great bipartisan cooperation, but only after I have first restrained them from doing what they initially wanted to do—so I’m worried about that.

Bipartisanship

Ms. Salinas. Mr. Bush said that if he was in office, if he was the President, we wouldn’t have that kind of problem, that he could work well with both Democrats and Republicans. Is that realistic?

The President. It’s realistic, but look at the scorecard here. Now, when we got—when they won the Congress, they said, “We don’t want to work with you. We’re going to do it our way.” And they had the biggest education and environmental cuts in history, the biggest Medicare premium increases in history, and so I vetoed them. They didn’t negotiate with us. They just said, “Take it or leave it,” and they shut the Government down. And the public made it clear they didn’t like that.

So look what’s happened since then, until right now. We had a bipartisan balanced budget agreement, a bipartisan welfare reform bill. We now have the biggest surpluses in history. We have the lowest welfare rolls in 32 years, cut in half. We had a bipartisan telecommunications bill, which has created thousands of businesses and hundreds of thousands of jobs. And this year, as I just said, we just had a bipartisan bill to increase the spending on land preservation, the biggest in history; a bipartisan bill to continue welfare reform; a bipartisan bill to relieve the debt of the poorest nations in the world; a bipartisan bill to reach out in trade to our friends in the Caribbean and in Africa.

We’ve had huge bipartisan cooperation. But the pattern is that the leadership of the Republican Party, at various points, will say, “Take it or leave it,” and then we’ll say no, and then we’ll have a bipartisan cooperation. And in the nature of things, the conflict gets more coverage than the cooperation.

But we’ve had wonderful bipartisan success here when they’ve been willing to work with us. You know, I hope and believe that

we still can get that done on the remaining business of this legislature.

2000 Campaign

Ms. Salinas. Let me go back to my question again. If the record is so good and the country is so strong, has there been a mistake? Has there been something lost in the message for Al Gore? What's his biggest mistake in this campaign?

The President. I don't know that it's—I think first of all, he's acquitted himself very well. I think the public knows that he knows more, that he's more experienced, that he's better qualified. But I think that in the public presentation of the other campaign, they've done a very good job in kind of blurring some of these differences.

So I think that what I'd like to see is what I always tell all of our Democratic friends, that clarity is our friend, if we can just make the differences clear and the consequences clear. For example, you can decide, if you believe in our program to put 100,000 police on the street and you want to continue it, you have one choice. If you want to get rid of it, you have another choice. If you believe in our program to put 100,000 teachers in the classrooms for smaller classes in the early grades, you can have one choice. If you don't believe it, you can have another one. If you believe that we ought to extend the background checks of the Brady law to people at gun shows, you have one choice. If you don't think they should apply to handguns bought at gun shows, you have another one. If you believe that we should keep trying to improve the environment, you have one choice. If you believe that we should relax some of our clean air standards and get rid of the order I issued to protect roadless areas in our national forests, you have another one.

So it's like people can really decide what they want as long as they know what the choices are. I always thought it would be a very close race, and I always thought that Governor Bush was a formidable opponent. They don't disagree on everything, but on the really important, big, economic, educational, health care, tax policy issues, there are these—Social Security—big, big, differences. And I think—you know, I just be-

lieve the Vice President is going to win in the end. I've always thought he would win.

Hispanic Vote

Ms. Salinas. You know that Republicans, particularly Mr. Bush, have been very active in seeking out the minority votes, especially the Hispanic vote. And they have made some inroads with Hispanics. Give me three reasons why Hispanics should vote for Al Gore.

The President. First, because he will keep the prosperity going and extend it to people and places that have been left behind. He will pay down the debt, keep interest rates low, and invest much, much more money in education, health care, and the environment, as opposed to the other approach, which will take us back to deficits and won't leave enough money to invest in our people and our future. So the economy is very important.

Secondly, he will push for things like immigrant fairness, an end to racial profiling, the Hispanic Education Action Plan that we created together. He ran the empowerment zone program, which included Hispanic communities around America, which has already helped a lot of economic revitalization. So he's right on the economics; he's right on the social issues.

Third, he believes that it's really important that we work hard to build one America and to reach out to the rest of the world. He'll be a good partner to Latin America. He'll be a good partner to Central America. He will be—he has the experience necessary to handle the crises of the world and to be a strong leader.

I don't have any question that he will be a very, very fine President. He makes good decisions, and he's ready for the job. And I think, to me, maybe those are arguments I could make to all Americans. But if you look at the issues that are really important to Hispanics—just take the minimum wage for example. Look at the difference in the two candidates on the minimum wage. One supported our first increase in the minimum wage and is fighting for the present one; the other was opposed to raising the minimum wage in Texas, which is only \$3.35 an hour. That's just one example.

So I believe—the only thing I would say to Latino Americans is, look at the issues;

look at the differences. Make up your own mind. But the differences are quite vast. You have two perfectly nice people. Both of them speak Spanish, and I think that's great. I hope I'll be the last non-Spanish-speaking President.

Ms. Salinas. Nada?

The President. Yes, just a little. I speak a little but very little, and I hope I'll be the last one. But beyond that, I think we ought to say you have two good people; they love their country; they love their families; they'll do what they think is right. They really see the world in very different ways. And I think if we can clarify that, I think the Vice President will win and win by more than people think he will today.

Mexico

Ms. Salinas. Let's talk about Latin America for a moment. You have always been a very strong supporter of Mexico. Now that there is a new President—he's an outsider, the same as you were an outsider when you came into office. What do you think Mr. Vicente Fox needs to do to be successful in a country that was governed by the same party, the PRI, for decades?

The President. Well, first, he's a very impressive man. He came up here to see me, and I followed his campaign. And I think, just as a person, he's quite an impressive person. He took on decades of tradition. He imagined how he could make it come out differently, and he did. So—and I identify with him. He lives on a ranch, and I came from a rural area, and I think he's a very impressive fellow.

I think what he has to do is to put together a good team, establish a reputation for real competence, and then develop a certain gift for getting the support of the other two main parties or their representatives in the Mexican national legislature wherever he can, and maintaining the support of the people. It's not going to be easy for him, because he knows he has to make some difficult decisions.

All reforms are always——

[At this point, a portion of the President's remarks were missing from the transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary.]

Colombia

Ms. Salinas. ——more involved in their fight against the guerrillas. People are dying every single day.

The President. No. I think what we want to do is to increase the capacity of the Colombian Government to enforce the law. We want to also increase the capacity of the Colombian Government to have a justice system that works and to offer the farmers and the poor people in the rural areas an alternative lifestyle so they don't have to have that drug money to make a decent living. I think that's very important.

And I think we should support the front-line states, the countries that border Colombia, that are also worried that if Colombia succeeds, they'll have even more problems. So we have some money in our Plan Colombia for the other states as well, states like Bolivia, the poorest country in the Andes, which has had, ironically, the greatest success in dealing with the drug issue.

Now, on the guerrilla problem, which is tied to the narcotrafficking problem, we still believe that over the long run, there will have to be some sort of negotiated peace settlement. And I wish—you know, the President, President Pastrana, has gone out of his way to try to seek a peace. And I don't think he's gotten an appropriate response from the rebels.

As I said, the money from the narcotrafficking may have something to do with that, but in the end, it's not good for Colombia to have as much of the land in turmoil and as many people killed every year as possible. But I think if they can get a handle on the narcotrafficking, it will increase their capacity to negotiate a peace on the political issues.

President's Legacy

Ms. Salinas. Let's talk a little bit about your legacy, Mr. President. What do you feel has been your greatest accomplishment and your biggest failures?

The President. I don't know. I think the historians will probably have to make a judgment about that. I think that the main thing is, we've turned the country around. We gave people a sense of hope and possibility. It's not just the economy. But the country is

working better now. It's not just the economy. The crime rate is down. All the indicators—that drug abuse among young people is down. Teen pregnancy is down at historically low levels.

As I said, the environment is stronger; the school systems are better; and the health care system is getting better. So I feel good about that. Are there things that I wish I could have done? Sure. I wish we could have completed the reform of Social Security. I wish we had found a way for all Americans to have health insurance.

But because we've got a strong economy, because I'm leaving a balanced budget and a surplus, the next administration, if Vice President Gore is elected, if people like my wife are elected to the Senate, we'll have the ability to extend health care coverage to working families, for example.

So I wish I could have done that, but you never get to do everything you want to do, and I've worked about as hard as I could for 8 years.

Ms. Salinas. Any regrets? Any personal regrets?

The President. Oh, of course I have some. But if I had to do it all over again, I would still want to be President. I would still want to have the chance to serve, and it's been a joy and an honor. I've loved it. I just—the work—having the chance every day to get up and work as hard as you can to fulfill the dreams of the people of this country is a great honor, especially to be here at the turn of the century, with the explosion of this new economy, with the end of the cold war and a whole new different set of affairs in the world, and with American society growing ever more diverse. I think it's so exciting.

This country is more exciting to live in than ever before in human history—in our history, in our 224-year history, and one of the most interesting societies, I think, in history just because it's so diverse. And yet we're still kind of making our democracy work. That's one of the reasons that it's so important for new immigrants to get out and vote, to prove that they believe in the system, and to reaffirm the fact that they have as much influence as anybody else does. On election day, my vote counts no more than someone who just registered.

First Family

Ms. Salinas. There's a recent poll that says that you and Mrs. Clinton are the most admired people in the country. But people want to know, do you feel that you have a solid marriage that will be able to outlive everything that you've been through?

The President. Well, I certainly hope so. I told Hillary when we got married—something I've repeated several times over the last 25 years, and we just celebrated our 25th anniversary—that one of my goals—this literally, when we were in our late twenties, one of my goals was to be an old man in my seventies, sitting on a park bench with her and seeing young people go by just in the beginning of their lives and have no regrets. And I still hope that will happen.

You know, we've got a home in New York now. I'm going to build a library in Arkansas, in my home, and I'm looking forward to this next chapter in my life. And I'm very proud of my wife, for the campaign she's run for the Senate. I'm very proud of our daughter, and I'm glad that Chelsea took this time off away from school to be with us in our last months in the White House and at her mother's campaign. So it's been a happy time for us, and I'm looking forward to the future.

Ms. Salinas. What will you be doing after you leave the White House, and what will you miss most about the White House and being President?

The President. I don't know what I'm going to do for sure. I'll try to be a useful citizen. I'll miss the work most and the daily contact with all different kinds of people. But I love the job. So it's the work I'll miss the most.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 5:27 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House for later broadcast, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 9. In his remarks, the President referred to Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush and Vice Presidential candidate Dick Cheney; President Vicente Fox of Mexico; and President Andres Pastrana of Colombia. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With José Diaz-Balart of Telemundo

November 4, 2000

Mr. Diaz-Balart. Mr. President, thank you very much for being with us on “Esta Manana.” It’s a pleasure having you.

The President. Glad to do it.

Hispanic Vote and the 2000 Election

Mr. Diaz-Balart. Let’s talk about the importance of November 7th, specifically towards the Latino population of the United States. Why should people who, many times, don’t feel part of this country, and yet are citizens, why should they vote?

The President. Because there are issues at stake that will directly affect themselves, their families, their communities, and our country. There are huge differences in the economic policies of the two candidates.

Obviously, I favor the ones that Vice President Gore and my wife and others have articulated, but there’s the question of whether you think it’s better to pay down the debt, have a smaller tax cut focused on the middle class, and invest more in education, or whether it’s better to have a bigger tax cut, partially privatized Social Security, and have spending that will take us back in debt but give some people more money right now. That will affect everybody. How do you build on the prosperity of the new—of the last 8 years?

Then, there are differences of opinion on crime, on the environment, on health care, on education, and on fairness toward immigrants, which should be a big issue to the Latino population. I and virtually everyone in my party are fighting for the fairness to immigrants act, and the leadership of the Republican Party is opposing us. And so we’re—and we have a simple position, which is that it was right to let people from Cuba and Nicaragua come into this country if they were fleeing dictatorial or violent environments, but we owe the same thing to the people from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, and other places. So I think that’s a big issue.

Then there are issues revolving around whether we should have hate crimes legislation. Should we have stronger laws guaran-

teeing equal pay for women? All these things will drastically affect, one way or the other, what life is like for ordinary Americans.

Voter Apathy

Mr. Diaz-Balart. Why do you think, sir, that the polls show that candidates really haven’t gotten through to all of the voters, that there’s some apathy, and there’s some feeling that, “You know what, I don’t even want to get involved with this?”

The President. I think the main—anybody that doesn’t want to get involved, I think, it’s because the issues aren’t as clear as they should be. But I also think, in a funny way, the general prosperity and sense of well-being of the country could be working against us a little bit. Because people may think, well, you know—younger voters, a lot of them can’t even remember what it was like 8 years ago.

And I think sometimes when times are good, you tend to be more casual about voting and about studying the differences. And then, maybe they—people, I think, do have a negative reaction sometimes to all this—the air wars—not just the Presidential race, but all these ads where they’re attacking each other and all that. That sometimes tends to depress turnout.

But I would hope the American people would actually be in a very good humor. I mean, this has been an essentially positive election. The candidates have been sharply critical of each other on the issues, but there has been surprisingly little personal attack. Governor Bush has, I think, wrongly questioned Vice President Gore’s character a couple of times, but by and large, both of them have run clean, positive campaigns in which they have strongly disagreed with each other on the issues. But that’s what democracy is about. I would think—I think the American people ought to be happy. I mean, the economy is growing; all sectors of the society are benefiting. Crime is down. The environment is cleaner. There are fewer people without health insurance. The schools are getting better.

I think that people should think, “Wow, we’ve got a chance now to really dream big dreams about what we want America to look like over the next 10 years. What should